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The American merchant  
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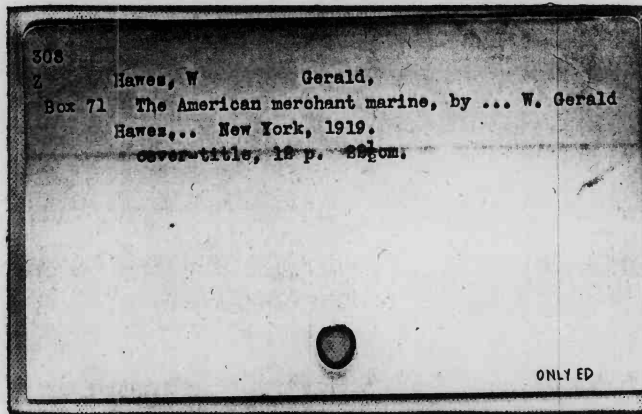
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# The American Merchant Marine



by

Capt. W. Gerald Hawes

January 6, 1919

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New York City

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## The American Merchant Marine

W. GERALD HAWES

Now that our armies and those of our Allies have been victorious, there no longer faces the nation that vital problem of winning the war, but in its place we have another tremendous problem, and that is the after war trade activities of our nation. Of course we all realize that the Merchant Marine is the keystone upon which the strength and continuance of our foreign trade is based, and to successfully co-ordinate the shipping problems with our diversified mercantile and national interests, a thorough understanding not only of the past, but of present conditions is necessary. Therefore, in summing up this situation, I present the following facts:

Directly after the war of the Revolution, the Merchant Marine of America forged ahead very rapidly. In fact our flag was seen in all the world's great ports, which naturally meant that we were carrying a great part of the world's commerce.

Prior to the War of 1812, we lost a great part of our shipping through the arbitrary policy of Great Britain. This was offset again during the years following that period by an increase, until about 1860, at which time 72 per cent. of our exports were carried by American vessels. The real decadence of America's shipping began after the Civil War, and was primarily caused by the scarcity of labor during and after the war and the fact that American industrial progress was so tremendous that our seamen found better terms at home than sailing the high seas.

During the period following the close of the Civil War, American ship owners began to turn to steel construction for their vessels, and Europe being in a better position than we were at that time owing to the high state of development of their steel and iron industry, as well as the fact that her labor costs were lower than ours in proportion, and most important of all, that American registry was for a century denied to foreign built ocean vessels, eliminated America as a factor in owning vessels or purchasing them where they were best made or sold most cheaply.

The foregoing being a fact, naturally Great Britain's maritime importance increased, with many of the European countries following in her wake, thus crowding America out of those essentials necessary to commercial success.

It is a surprising fact that prior to the war just ended, America controlled only about 3,000,000 tons of the world's maritime tonnage, of which 2,000,000 tons were in our coastwise trade, leaving but 1,000,000 tons for inter-ocean traffic, and a greater part of that was

under foreign control. These figures show that our maritime standing was almost negligible, for during 1913 but 9 per cent. of our exports were carried by our own tonnage.

Again, the pre-war tonnage of Great Britain was approximately 25,000,000 tons, and even though 40 per cent. of this was lost through submarine destruction, we are still bound to concede that while Great Britain's maritime status is temporarily lessened, she is and always will be a tremendous factor in commerce; and, making comparisons, we cannot but see that there must be no cessation on our part as to ship building activities.

With the 3,000,000 tons of shipping owned by the United States at the beginning of the war, plus 3,000,000 tons which we added by requisition, we had at the close of the first year of the war, with the 1,500,000 tons constructed during that period, approximately 7,500,000 tons. The present rate of construction, which is on an average of 350,000 tons per month, with a commensurate increase each succeeding month, means that during the present year we should have approximately 10,000,000 tons of shipping, and if this same ratio of construction is kept up, it further assures us within the next few years a Merchant Marine fleet of approximately 20,000,000 tons, which would give to America the leadership in the world's shipping.

Of course we might advance any number of theories or questions as to how this Merchant Marine is to be maintained successfully. Let me say right now that this is not the time for any debate as to its feasibility or as to the competition of America with foreign countries. The main fact before us is that we will have this great asset of a Merchant Marine of 20,000,000 tons, and it is up to us not only to maintain it, but to support it in keeping with the principles of America's best traditions.

Again, the matter of America's Merchant Marine must and will be given the most serious consideration, as well as all questions as to the enactment of subsidies and the repeal of certain provisions detrimental to the success of our Merchant Marine, namely, some of those contained in the so-called La Follette law.

Now, as to the cost of construction we find that previous to the war we were able to construct boats on the Great Lakes of the fabricated type, for approximately \$30.00 per ton against Great Britain's \$45.00, while on the Atlantic seaboard the cost ran anywhere from \$70.00 to \$75.00 per ton. How can this best be explained? Well, on the Great Lakes they constructed standardized ships similar to the plan carried out by Great Britain, while on the seaboard we constructed them in a haphazard and indifferent way, which naturally added tremendously to the cost. Many facts presented, however, show that if we can construct them on the Great Lakes at a saving of \$15.00 per ton over Great Britain's cost, we can do the same on the seaboard, if the same principles of construction are carried out.

In the question covering the present cost of construction, which approximates anywhere from \$200.00 to \$300.00 per ton—how can we com-

pare this to the foreign cost? In this connection it must be realized that the foreign builders have the same labor problems as we have, with the added cost of raw materials and finished products which it is necessary for them to secure from this country. Of course one will readily grant that this condition as to foreign labor and high cost will not exist within a reasonable period after the war, and that abroad they will no doubt cut down the cost of construction tremendously. Now this is the point where America must realize—first, that the creation of this great Merchant Marine of ours has been due to the war, and secondly that in order to properly base our returns on the investment, we must charge off a part of this cost as a war measure, thus putting in the final summing up the valuation of our shipping close to that of the foreign cost.

There have been of late, many suggestions and recommendations for the equalization of the cost of our Merchant Marine. In other words, that ton to ton, compared to foreign shipping, it should bear the proper relation of cost. The most feasible plan which has been presented to date would seem that one which was presented by the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, and which is as follows:

"The Emergency Fleet Corporation shall offer for sale to American owners, personal or corporate, ships based upon a per ton price corresponding to the price at which ships of similar size, class and description can be purchased or built in standard foreign yards at the time of sale. The Government shall receive 25 per cent. of the purchase price in cash and shall take a mortgage on the ship for 75 per cent. of the sale price at 2½ per cent. interest, the mortgage to run for a period of fifteen years, the purchaser to make payment into a Sinking Fund in such installments as may be agreed upon so as to extinguish the mortgage by the completion of its term. At the expiration of five years from the date of purchase, but in no case later than January 1st, 1925, the purchaser shall have the privilege of calling for a re-appraisal of the principal of the mortgage, the remaining unpaid amount to be based upon the ascertained cost at that time of building a similar ship in standard foreign yards less proper deduction for depreciation in the expired time."

A careful study of the foregoing would readily show that an agreement of this kind is not only fair to ship owners, but, provided the Government believes in private control, it would seem the only practical and logical course for the Government to take.

Now, assuming for a final analysis, the fact that our tonnage cost is based on that equal to foreign tonnage, how do we plan for competition in cost of operation and maintenance? We know that the labor costs of the European nations will always be much lower than ours. For instance, take the fact that the Japanese feed their crews for about 17 cents to 21 cents per day, and the Danes for about 34 cents, with higher increases for the Anglo-Saxon crews. Of course, America will never stand for the lowering of her labor conditions, and particularly so as this is a democracy for the good of all concerned, and I

see no reason why the same principles for advancement and high class labor cannot be applied to our maritime activities.

We readily agree that there are many provisions in the La Follette law that are totally in opposition to the principles of a successful Merchant Marine, and the repeal of which will do much toward the solving of our shipping problems. There, however, arises one fundamental fact in the La Follette law and that is, no matter what the compensation or surroundings may be of foreign crews, America will never stand for a cheapening or neglect of American labor employed on an American Merchant Marine. Having these facts in mind, we must seek some equal plane whereby the success of these different plans may be worked out.

We have heard so much in the past as to subsidies, and furthermore that the American public will not stand for same. To my mind and to that of every American citizen as well, the subsidy question in the past has been a game of political shuttle cock, along which lines we could never hope to have a definite solution.

We know that to-day with the wonderful future facing us from a commercial standpoint in the foreign field, that we must maintain our Merchant Marine on a subsidy basis. Of course again, the subsidy allowance in these times as well as in the future, will not show such a tremendous difference as heretofore, because by having established trade routes, our ships shall carry a full complement at all times. Secondly, through adequate docks and harbor facilities, they shall be enabled to arrive and depart speedily. Again through the agency of automatic cranes and loading and unloading devices, their stay in port shall be materially lessened, thus cutting down the cost of maintaining crews in idleness.

Another fact to be considered is that the Merchant Marine is a factor in promoting trade relations. By this I mean that by having our ships touch at all the different ports of the world, and of a construction that will permit of their carrying passengers as well as freight, instead of our former type of tramp steamer, we will be enabled to carry our merchants as well as the merchants of other ports back and forth for the establishment not only of trade relations, but of the vast development of American commerce.

By having American crews and officers, we shall also do much to promote this understanding, as they, going to foreign ports will not only advertise our trade resources, but will bring back to us the requirements and customs of foreign nations so that in serving these foreign interests we may do as the European nations have done in the past, i.e., give them what they want, as they want it and when they want it; which certainly would mean the holding of all the trade thus secured.

There still remains one important factor to be decided by our shipping interests, and that is the best type of vessel which can be constructed of standardized type. Our experience during the war has shown that wooden ships are not practical. Again the cement type

of ship has not proven as practical as the all steel type; so that in the future the ship building interests are pretty apt to work along the line of steel construction of either the riveted or welded type. These ships should be in most instances of the combined passenger and freight type.

The United States Shipping Board has also found during the past year that a vessel from 5,000 tons to 7,500 tons is the most economical type. In most instances it is desirable that this type of vessel be of the combined passenger and freight type, with refrigerating equipment and port hatches. In certain zones it is possible that these vessels be of the oil burning type. Allowing for the fact that in the future our vessels will be fitted with the latest automatic devices for loading and unloading, we can readily see that great economies are bound to be effected in their operation. This in itself, allowing for the fact that these ships shall be manned by competent crews, as well as by a competent engineering staff, means that their efficiency will materially cut down the high labor cost which I believe is bound to stay at all times on American vessels.

Also in connection with the foregoing, there must be a thorough education of the inland interests as to the possibilities of a Merchant Marine. They must know that through its agency they directly benefit by the shipment of cereals, live stock and dairy products. Again they must realize that the ships of our nation are really a continuation of the railroads. That the railroads have no termini, because the ports, with their marginal railways, docks and warehouses merely act as a transfer agent so that in the future we have the seaboard as well as all the American people to realize that ships are for the benefit of all, and we must co-operate with one another and suppress all petty jealousies and indifferences as to sectional products. As an illustration—if any one port realizes that New Orleans or Savannah should have adequate appropriations, they as a unit should support them. Again, if the South realizes the wonderful possibilities of New York, Boston or Seattle, they should whole-heartedly and conscientiously support any measure that would enable their products to be shipped economically and efficiently to foreign fields.

Again on the subject of waterways, where channels or inland waterways are necessary in any particular part of the country, they should be fostered and encouraged by all interests.

In the final summing up of the foregoing, it should be realized that the American railways have done much for the United States. By that I mean their efficient mode of transportation, such as the different types of cars for carrying steel, live stock, and refrigerating products. If these same principles can be carried to the Merchant Marine there is no doubt as to our making a store door service of foreign fields, beside creating a triangle service to certain sections and direct service to others, which would mean a full complement for our ships at all times, viz.: The carrying of certain of our products direct to Europe and from Europe taking certain products necessary to South America.

and on the return voyage bring back coffee and other products necessary to the States.

The final agent necessary to the success of our merchant marine as allied with America's commerce is through co-operation and co-ordination of all our various interests, and as to how this could be best carried out. I am of the opinion that a Director of Commerce should be stationed at each port or section; he in turn should work directly under the Secretary of Commerce at Washington. The duties of this Director of Commerce would be such as to assure the success of every department involved. By this I mean that there should be in the hands of this Director of Commerce at all times the dissemination of export and import statistics, advices regarding import regulations, marine intelligence, as well as the recommendations for the equalization of rail, canal and marine rates, so that all sections of the country could directly benefit by foreign trade. It would be further necessary for the Director of Commerce to co-operate with the different port authorities as well as the business interests for the recommending of proper railway, shipping and harbor facilities, so that in the long run the whole would be one cohesive unit for success.

Again the question of the Consular Service would come under this Director of Commerce, who could recommend such men or parties as would be competent, with their knowledge of certain manufactures and of certain districts, to successfully promote American commerce in foreign fields.

Of course all of us realize that these problems are not going to be settled in a day or a year, but pending the final success of these plans, it behooves every one of us, the merchant, the banker, the laborer and the professional man, to acquaint himself with every angle of this vital subject so that when the time comes he will be ready to take his place, and to fit into a well devised plan that will go toward making the nation not only the leader of democracy, but pre-eminent in commerce.

### THIRTY FUNDAMENTAL POINTS REGARDING AFTER THE WAR TRADE ACTIVITIES

#### MERCHANT MARINE

*The following are the replies made by Capt. HAWES to a series of thirty questions put by the Hon. EDWARD N. HURLEY, Chairman of the United States Shipping Board, to various commercial organization shipping committees throughout the country:*

1. The question as to whether the ownership of a Merchant Marine should be under private or Government control is of course debatable. The majority of our citizens, however, would favor private control with Government supervision, particularly so as it creates a greater scope for initiative and progressiveness.
2. If the ships of our Merchant Marine are turned over to operating companies, I think it should be by direct sale, as a compensation

offer for replacements and deterioration could not very readily be fixed for reimbursement under lease.

3. The great success of the Hamburg American, the Royal Mail and the Holland America lines, was due in a great measure to private ownership and initiative combined with Government regulation, as well as great subsidy allowances, and which by the result attained from every standpoint of commerce, amply repaid these Government subsidies.
4. It certainly would be preferable if a Merchant Marine under private control worked along the same lines as the foreign interests, i.e., that the routes be well chosen for the carrying of profitable cargoes at all times. It is also essential to the success of our Merchant Marine that these ships have fixed intervals of sailing, with definite dates of arrival, all of which would mean that not only our foreign customers, but our home merchants as well, could absolutely depend upon our Merchant Marine carrying out all that is meant by the shipping term of "despatch."
5. The matter of rate conferences or agreements for the maintenance of rates as well as the equalization of same, would mean much toward the successful transporting not only of our products, but those in the foreign field. Furthermore, if these conferences were under the supervision of the Shipping Board, the many factors governing the ill-success of some of the companies in the past would be eliminated. As for instance—rate fluctuations, unstable rates with their attendant effect of poorly regulated competition, as well as ultimate receivership.
6. The phase of tramp steamships in our after the war trade activities, is one which also calls for the most drastic Federal supervision, particularly so as it has been this phase of the Merchant Marine that has demoralized legitimate shipping interests. Again one might say that these tramp steamships furnish the competition for the bigger lines. On the other hand you know that if these tramp steamships were under direct supervision, with fixed routes, as well as ships of our Merchant Marine, they would be a great credit to our entire shipping scheme. As to their furnishing the necessary rate competition, as well as being a protection against conference rates, I think this would not be the case, particularly so as all shipping rates in the future would be under the domination of the United States Shipping Board, and probably along the lines of the Interstate Commerce Commission, except that in the case of the Shipping Board, the men chosen for this particular department would have a broader vision than the many narrow minded men who in the past have composed every interstate commission.
7. As to the amending of our navigation laws, this also calls for considerable thought on the part of our citizens, particularly so as for

the success of a Merchant Marine with its attendant angles, one must not be hampered by the many cross purpose navigation laws which are now on our statute books. In the first place they prevent legitimate competition, and in the second place, offer a wide scope for foreign interests to reap the benefits of our investments. As for instance, the La Follette law and other laws. These could be readily repealed, at the same time embodying many of their good provisions in one complete shipping law, which, by providing for just competition with foreign interests, would still maintain the high standard both in quarters and wages that is necessary to American labor.

#### PORTS AND PORT FACILITIES

8. As to the improvement of the different ports, this is now being furthered by the different port authorities, and from recent data compiled, as well as advices from these port authorities, it will readily be seen that there is a spirit of progressiveness for the erection of ample docks, warehouses with their attendant marginal railways, and mechanical appliances such as electric cranes, etc., which mean for the economical transfer of both in and out bound freight.
9. The subject of free ports, or free zones as it is known in commercial channels, is one that at present is being given considerable consideration by the Government, and it is further agreed by many of the leading shipping and commercial authorities that if the free zones system can be put into effect efficiently in many of our larger sea ports, it will mean that both imports and exports can be handled quite expeditiously, beside eliminating all the previous annoying customs red tape, which has so hampered our foreign trade in the past with its maze of papers, affidavits, etc.
10. As to the port and custom charges at the various ports, I readily agree that these should be not only reasonable, but equalized in line with the specific overhead charges at any given port. By doing this, it will readily be seen that all ports would then be on an equal basis for the adequate returns on the capital invested as well as the attendant improvements. Now that the different port authorities are agreed as to the furthering of any laws or improvements that would benefit the different ports, and as they in conference have agreed to support these propositions, it will mean in the future that we shall have the whole country working as one unit for the success of our commerce, thus eliminating all those petty jealousies and unwise laws that have so hampered our success in the past.
11. The matter of proper trade routing is one that will call for the greatest consideration, particularly so as by making these trade routes of an efficient character, we shall at all times furnish our

ships with adequate cargoes, whether they be on direct return routes, triangular or circular routes, and all of which will mean the carrying of our exports as well as the carrying of our imports in the highest way consistent with the promotion of our foreign commerce, beside furthering our insurance, banking and commercial assets.

#### BANKING

12. It is vitally necessary that branches of our American banks be maintained in all foreign countries, particularly so as this is practically the keystone of maintaining the success of our commerce combined with our merchant marine. The many authorities agree that these branches could be under either individual or a combined group of national bankers, and which would probably be better than said branches being distinct branches of the Federal Reserve Bank. This would again create independence and progressiveness, at the same time assuring Government supervision with said banks being part of the Federal Reserve system.
13. With the installment of our branch banks in all the various countries, I think the facilities for trade acceptance from the foreign interests would take on more stability than in the past, particularly so as we would have the reports as to the standing and customs of these foreign interests from our own branches direct, instead of depending on foreign banks as heretofore for this information. This being the case, it seems quite agreed among banking interests that trade acceptance would be the proper scheme for facilitating foreign commerce, and which could be discounted for the local banks in any one point as well as allowing for re-discount through the Federal Reserve Bank. This would readily relieve our home banking interests of the necessity of carrying advances based on shipping documents, and would mean an honest as well as more systematic liquidation on the shipment of our commodities.

#### FOREIGN MERCHANDISE STANDARDS

14. There should certainly be on file at the different cities throughout the country charts showing the design as well as the weight, measurement and quality of the various commodities required by foreign interests, so that the manufacture and shipment of foreign goods may be facilitated with none of the former claims as to material not being in line with their requirements. This would also mean the correct interpretation and fulfillment of all orders at our end according to foreign requirements, as well as a satisfied customer at the other end. The matter of merchandise standards would also probably come under the scope of the Directors of Commerce, which I recommend be stationed at all the different large cities for the furtherance as well as dissemination of all the necessary information regarding foreign customs, terms, shipping and rail intelligence.



**CREATION OF AMERICAN CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE IN ALL FOREIGN COUNTRIES**

15. This matter is also one of the essential requisites for the promotion of our foreign trade. The success of this measure has already been shown in many ways by the standing of our Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York in several of the foreign countries, and which body without any selfish promotion for New York's trade, has in a great measure benefited the commerce of many sections of the United States in the foreign field. I certainly am a firm believer in the establishment of chambers of commerce in all the leading cities of the world, and which might be fostered and encouraged under the National Association of Manufacturers, as well as the co-operation of all the leading shipping, banking and insurance interests. This in a great measure would mean the elimination of all local jealousies, at the same time meaning for the success of all the combined interests of the country as one unit in the foreign trade field.

**TARIFFS**

16. The question of tariffs is one that has many sides, and which under discussion could be carried on indefinitely as to its benefits or limitations. I firmly believe, however, as a greater part of our merchants do, that a protective tariff is absolutely necessary to this country's welfare, as much now as ever before. It is to be readily understood that a short while after the war, many of our foreign friends are going into the commercial game with a vim, and which it is quite fair to expect. At that time there will no doubt be a tremendous competition from a labor standpoint, and if we are to maintain the success of our industries, we must in a measure protect the investment as well as the high cost of same. Again, we must foster the most pleasant relations with all countries, and I do not believe that a stone wall tariff on all commodities will be necessary, but merely for the protection of those commodities which are vital assets to America's trade. However, it is quite agreed among many authorities that there be an exchange of tariff views, so that we may secure equitable treatment from the foreign nations in exchange for our meeting them on their tariff views.

**RECIPROCAL FOREIGN VISITS**

17. It is very essential that either merchants or their representatives get in touch with the foreign interests, and which is the basis for the establishment not only of the customs and conditions, but the requirements of our foreign trade. It is also most desirable that either these merchants themselves or groups of merchants forming commissions representative of the different industries, arrange to visit these foreign countries to study conditions at first hand. It

is also important that they arrange to have the foreign merchants as well as the buyers, visit us and which could be easily arranged either through our own banking interests, or the American Chambers of Commerce abroad. These functions could be admirably promoted by the Director of Commerce at the different cities throughout the country, and who from the information in their possession will be well qualified to formulate the necessary details.

18. The question as to merchants and farmers in the interior being able to conduct a foreign business might well be answered by their working along the same lines as expressed in paragraph No. 17, and which certainly would give them a thorough knowledge as to all the details connected with the financing and shipping of foreign commerce.

**PROPER CONSULAR OR FOREIGN TRADE REPRESENTATION**

19. While in the past we have been represented by many admirable consuls, yet on the other hand owing to the fact that the compensation was very small and the duties very arduous, we were unable to get the highest type of men for this position, i.e., that instead of having men who had made a study of commerce, and furthermore had had experience in same, we appointed quite frequently men of political capacity who had a very limited knowledge of what foreign trade relations meant, the result being as is universally known, that the foreign countries all forged ahead in their trade relations while we practically remained quiescent. It is therefore very important that in the future we give the most particular attention to this phase of our foreign trade, i.e., that men should be appointed who are fitted for the promotion of foreign commerce through their not only having a knowledge, but thorough experience in same. It is also necessary as previously stated that we send abroad these various trade commissions to promote commercial intercourse. Or again, at any given port we may have as an assistant or working in co-operation with our consul, some designated trade representative, and who in turn could make up the necessary reports as to conditions, requirements, and which would be further supplemented by the consular report as to the conditions such as reciprocity, tariff, duties, etc. This trade representative as well as the consul at these different ports should also be not only working under the supervision of the Department of Commerce, but be governed by the recommendations of this department, and all of which certainly would mean for America lasting commercial benefit.

**EDUCATION COVERING FOREIGN COMMERCE**

20. It is quite fitting that the rising generation should be taught the fundamentals of foreign trade, and this can be done efficiently by attractively combining elementary history and geography, so that

the assimilation by the youthful mind will mean for the thorough knowledge of our foreign trade at maturity.

21. The same principles as to the educating of our youths along the lines of geography, commerce and history, should be applied to the higher grades, so that on advancement into high schools or colleges, the curriculum would thoroughly cover every phase of our national problems in commerce, i.e., starting with economics they would next take up agriculture, and in the following order, manufacturing, commercial adaptability of certain locations, port and harbor conditions, imports and exports from certain ports, railroads and inland waterways conditions, and lastly, how through the Merchant Marine our commerce may not only be furthered, but facilitated to that degree of success which would continue to mean our pre-eminence in this particular field.

#### LOCAL COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

27. No one for an instant denies that the progressiveness of our commerce is better exemplified than through the various local chambers of commerce, and who have done so much for the promotion of our national trade. It is also important that these different chambers of commerce work along the same lines as that of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, and which as previously explained in paragraph No. 15, has not only fostered and cemented our European trade relations but through its various committees, such as Harbors and Rivers, Arbitration, etc., has secured and maintained for the United States the respect and admiration of the various European countries in our progressive way of handling same.
28. It is also most important that these various chambers of commerce throughout the country not only co-operate with each other
29. for the facilitation and promotion of their individual civic and national requirements, but also arrange to co-operate with the Department of Commerce, and then through the foreign chambers of commerce with the different American interests abroad, all of which would mean for the united success commercially of our country.
30. It certainly is not only a matter of national pride, but the duty of every citizen to further the commerce of the United States, and I know of no better way in which patriotism can be exemplified than through co-operating with and furthering those vital units such as railways, ports and the Merchant Marine.



**END OF  
TITLE**